1: Childs M-S (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13

The field of Umbundu reactions to cultural influences is a wide and an important one. Whatever contact the Ovimbundu or their progenitors may have had with the early Roman Catholic missions, little impress seems to have been made. The cross has been adopted as an object used in divination. Certain rites *seem* superficially to resemble the procession with the Host, but there is no indication of the assimilation of any ethical or conceptual element from Christianity during the early or formative period.[1]

Christianity first came to the Ovimbundu with the arrival of three missionaries at Bailundu in March 1881.[2] This was during the reign of Ekuikui and proved to be not the least important event of that reign. It is not within the scope of this study to give a history of the work of this Mission.[3] Its inception was planned as carefully as the times permitted, and although its subsequent development did not always proceed according to plan, its progress on the whole has been of an orderly nature, and it has produced noteworthy results which have been evaluated by deputations, by commissions, and by other visitors from time to time.[4]

The amount of interdenominational co-operation achieved in this field is worthy of note. There are the missions of the

[1] There were missions of the Jesuits, Capuchins, Carmelites, &c., in Angola from 1575 until about 1800, and there were priests as chaplains of the various presidios visited by the Ovimbundu during most of their history. Major Artur de Paiva, writing in 1890 (see *Boletim Soc. Geog. Lisboa*, 1895, p. 15 f.), describes the ruins of a Roman Catholic mission which he found in Cingolo (*Quingolo*) and which he judged to have dated from the end of the eighteenth century. I have found no reference in any historical work to the founding or operation of such a mission. It may have been built about 1770 when Governor Souza Coutinho ordained a number of towns in the Benguela hinterland, but the absence of specific reference to it seems to indicate that its existence was short.

[2] Messrs. Bagster, Sanders, and Miller sent out by the A.B.C.F.M. (Boston) to inaugurate a mission in Bihe, for that region was well known from the reputation of its traders, while Bailundu and other Umbundu regions had scarcely been heard of.

[3] For a brief summary of the early years see Strong, *The Story of the American Board*, pp. 336 ff.; also two articles in vol. 126 (1930) of the *Missionary Herald*, pp. 424-9; J. T. Tucker, *Drums in the Darkness*, gives a historical treatment of the work of this mission.

[4] There have been two 'deputations' sent to the West Central Africa Mission, in 1911 and in 1930, reports of which were issued by the A.B.C.F.M. Secretaries have visited the mission in 1924, '28, '30, '34, '38, and '46, and have given their impressions either in the *Missionary Herald* or in the *United Church Record and Missionary Review*. The report of the African Education Commission dealt with the work of this mission (T. J. Jones, *Education in Africa*, pp. 40, 239 f., 245 ff.). Among visitors who have written of this work see Nevinson, op. cit., chap. 7; J. Johnston, op. cit., chaps. 2, 3, and 4.

1: Childs M-S (1924-1940) 1949 FP 13 Mbundu FP 13

A.B.C.F.M. (Congregational) and of the United Church of Canada, which for practical purposes work as one mission. This mission co-operates with several smaller organizations and with the Angola Evangelical Alliance. This prevailing spirit of co-operation has been noticed by travellers.[1] Another characteristic has been 'regard for plan, order, and "cultivation of the field" ', according to the African Education Commission.[2] Of yet greater significance has been the extent to which this mission has been able to seize upon and develop indigenous initiative. This showed in the early organization of the Church, which was encouraged to develop its own life from the start. The utilization of indigenous forms, especially of social organization, has been a source of real strength.

Further development in this direction is greatly to be desired. For such further development, and indeed for all orderly growth, more knowledge of Umbundu life and attitudes, and an orderly synthesis of knowledge already in hand is a *sine qua non*. It is hoped that the present writer's study may help to supply the lacunae. A recent Roman Catholic handbook for missionaries in Africa has urged that for each ethnic and linguistic region a mission should have specialists in each field of research.[3] Although this advice may be considered 'for the present a counsel of perfection', it is the direction toward which missions are working,[4] an ideal which they must realize in the not too distant future. If Protestant missions in Africa are to maintain the place of leadership which, because of their evangelistic zeal they have had, they cannot neglect this zeal for knowledge which is demanded to-day.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Huambo (*Pères du Saint-Esprit*), which embraces most of the Umbundu territory, seems to have had no specialists of the type named above who have devoted themselves to a study of the Ovimbundu. Père Ernest Lecomte

[1] Compare Nevinson, op. cit., p. 140, 'there are two . . . notable orders at work in Angola—the American mission (Congregationalist) under the "American Board", and the English mission (Plymouth Brethren) under divine direction only. . . . Of all the sects that I have known, these are the only two that I have ever heard pray for each other, and that without condemnation.'

[2] Dr. T. J. Jones, op. cit., p. 40. Recommendations for further developments according to carefully considered plans were made by Dr. F. K. Sanders in his *Report of Deputation*, 1930 (A.B.C.F.M.).

[3] H. Dubois, *Le Répertoire Africain* (Rome, 1932), pp. 157 ff.

[4] See article by J. H. Oldham, 'The Educational Work of Missionary Societies', in *Africa*, Jan. 1934, p. 47 f.

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13

797 795 produced an Umbundu grammar,[1] but does not seem to have published material of an ethnological nature. Père Keiling (who died in 1937) and Père Batteix were both listed in *Le Répertoire Africain* as specializing in the 'Ganguella' language.[2] The Umbundu missions of this Diocese date from 1890 (Caconda), 1896 (Bailundo), 1912 (Cuando), and later. From early days this mission has had quite evident political aspects—from 1889 when a military expedition was sent against the 'Ganguella Soba[3] Tchiuaco' to re-establish Père Lecomte and the Cubango mission station which had been attacked and expelled,[4] up to the recent government charters and mission statutes, which heavily subsidize the religious work of the Roman Catholic missions in Angola. The constitution of the Portuguese Republic decrees the separation of Church and State and full religious liberty. The large subsidies and other special privileges given to the Roman Catholic Church in Angola, however, create difficulties beyond the mere allocation of tax-money. In other parts of Africa the Roman Catholic missions co-operate with the Protestant in many spheres of action. It is to be regretted that such co-ôperation seems not to be desired in Angola. Is it a sort of monopolistic political aim which keeps the Roman Catholic missionaries of Angola aloof? The rare instances in which a more friendly spirit has been manifested only add point to the question. The appreciative and co-operative spirit shown by Padre J. Alves Correia[5] may be cited.

797 179 754 Roman Catholics and Protestants have both been very successful from a numerical standpoint.[6] Success in building a truly indigenous Church, or in providing it with suitable and capable leadership from its own ranks, is another question hardly to be judged from statistics. More elusive still is the question whether,

[1] *Boletim Soc. Geog. Lisboa*, 1897. This grammar has gone through several editions and is still in use. The orthography is evidently intended to facilitate the use of the language by one whose native tongue is French and rather complicates matters for an African, and, indeed, for anyone whose language is other than French.

[2] H. Dubois, *op. cit.*, p. 340.

[3] *Soba*, a native chief (from *Sousa*).

[4] *Benguella*, *op. cit.*, 1891, pp. 10 ff.

[5] See his books, *A Lavoura do Reino de Deus* (Lisboa, 1932); *A Vida Mais Alta*, &c.

[6] Roman Catholics have about 180,000 and Protestants about 140,000 adherents among the Ovimbundu, according to the census taken in 1940 (Colónia de Angola, *Censo Geral da População*, vol. ix; Luanda, Imprensa Nacional, 1943).

6:Edwards E-5 (1955-1956)1962
FP13 Mbundu FP13

of the school seems considerably stronger than that of their Catholic counterparts. This impression is gained by visits to Protestant villages and to episodes like that just quoted, where the Protestant catechist had more success than the Catholic in recruiting volunteers for work on the bridge. The reasons for this lie in the organization of the Protestant Church, which owes its origin to Congregationalist missionaries, and in which the distribution of power differs from that in the Catholic Church. The white missionaries exercise only a supervisory role over the work of the Native Church which is responsible for pastoral activity in the villages. The African clergy of the Native Church are entirely dependent financially on their people.

Compared with Catholicism, Protestantism lays much less stress on the sacraments of baptism and communion and much more on Bible-reading and the religious knowledge of the individual. Hence the teaching role of the catechist is more strongly stressed among the Protestants. For example, the Protestant catechists teach girls as well as boys to read and write. His dependence on the clergy is reduced; indeed, owing to the lay participation in the Umbundu Native Church he exercises some control over them. Among the Ovimbundu, as elsewhere in the world, the 'pyramidal' form of Catholicism is absent in Protestantism in which the position of the clergy is weaker and that of the lay leaders strengthened.

The relative autonomy of the Umbundu Native Church *vis-à-vis* the white missionaries and the disintegration of the traditional system of authority have given judicial powers to its officials. Dr. Childs has written in a recent article:[1] 'In Angola . . . the breakdown of traditional authority has been so rapid that the social life of the villages is now very near to complete anarchy . . . the missions and churches have been compelled to take over. Church leaders—catechists, deacons, and pastors—have taken on judicial functions. Church meetings, both local and regional, have become courts and councils.' He goes on to describe the legalistic attitudes and casuistical morality which is associated with these developments, and suggests that the lack of opportunity for political activity

[1] G. M. Childs, *International Review of Missions*, April 1958.

6:Edwards E-5 (1955-1956)1962
FP13 Mbundu FP13

795 178 confines the pursuit of power to the Native Church with unfortunate results. It might, on the other hand, be suggested that the Protestants among the Ovimbundu are the section of the population who have come nearest to building up new systems of authority and law. It might also be suggested that Umbundu Protestantism retains certain historical features of Congregationalism—democratic selection of officials with strict discipline binding members of the congregation, industriousness and zeal for education, and a certain consciousness of being a spiritual *élite*.[3]

795 Another factor in the situation is that the Protestants are a minority compared with the Catholics and tend to have the heightened self-consciousness of religious minorities. They also tend to isolate themselves from the pagans much more than the Catholics do, both geographically by moving into separate hamlets and separate villages and by the greater efforts they make to understand and follow European custom. Protestants for instance seem to know more how the Portuguese kinship terms should be used.

797 177 Ultimately, the position of the catechist, whether Catholic or Protestant, is dependent on his role as a teacher of Christian doctrine, and as being a representative of 'modern' values. It may be said that Christian doctrine and 'modern' values are not necessary identical. It is, however, in this field that the Ovimbundu establish their closest contacts with the Europeans. A Protestant explaining why a kinship usage had been discontinued said: 'We are Christians, we are like the Europeans.'

795 A Catholic catechist arguing the superiority of Catholicism to Protestantism began by saying that the Protestants had no sacraments—then the elder of the school chimed in saying: 'And ours is the religion of the government.' The catechist took up this theme: 'The *chefe de posto* is baptized and married in church, the Governor-General [*sic*] of Nova Lisboa is baptized and married in church.' During my first weeks in Epalanga I was asked by the catechist: 'Are there priests in England?' and replied that in England there were both Catholics and Protestants, on which the catechist commented: 'It's the same thing in Bimbe.'

[3] For the history of Congregationalism see E. Troelsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, London, 1931, Vol. II, p. 661–6.

6:Edwards E-5 (1955-1956)1962
FP13 Mbundu FP13

thing in Bimbe.' That is, church membership is recognized as giving entry to a world-wide grouping. This sense of being linked to the Europeans by participation in the same sacraments is paralleled on the European side by the custom widespread in Angola of whites standing as godparents to their servants or servants' children. More generally, the missions are regarded as being the cause of that social change which is welcomed by Ovimbundu. Thus the fact that this was 'the time of the school' was given by one of my servants as the reason for such improvements as the decline of sorcery and the increase of cleverness.

Ovimbundu Christians are also aware of the doctrinal significance of baptism—when I asked various people 'Why did you receive baptism?' a general reply would be: 'I want to go to heaven', or some equivalent phrase. The apprehension of Catholic doctrine by the Ovimbundu is a complicated subject. It may be said that the receiving of the sacraments is the aspect of religion that has made most impression on the people. In the conversation previously cited, the catechist began by emphasizing the presence of sacraments as the distinctive mark of Catholicism against Protestantism, and then when the elder of the school pointed to the official associations of Catholicism, the catechist developed this by indicating the receiving of sacraments by those in high office. In the same way a catechist may commend somebody by saying: 'He is baptized and married in Church', as we would say of somebody: 'He is a real Christian'. The contact of the people with the priests, whether at the mission, or in the villages, usually involves the making of confessions and the receiving of communion. Cultural traits particularly characteristic of Portuguese Catholicism are little marked with the exception of the social importance of the godfather-godson tie. Christian ideas of the after-life have penetrated among the pagans, who will say that the soul after death goes to God (Suku) except in the case of bad people who go to hell.

The social relations between Christians and pagans are friendly. The old rites in which the sub-chiefdom as a whole participated have disappeared, and the rites performed at the capital, a liturgy which like other aspects of chieftaincy is a shadow of its former self, arouse little public interest. Christians

6:Edwards E-5 (1955-1956)1962
FP13 Mbundu FP13

and pagans co-operate in weddings and funerals. In certain aspects of funeral rites, and in commemorations of ancestors the Christians participate, justifying themselves by arguing that they are purely social functions and have no religious significance. This differs from their attitude to the major exorcism rites,[4] which are avoided by Christians, who regard them with some horror, and towards consulting diviners. Although visiting diviners is strictly forbidden by both Catholic and Protestant missionaries, a high proportion of their people do this,[5] but clandestinely. Thus I was told that there were no diviners in Gumba; in fact, there were two living in Epalanga. It is important to remember that there exist nowadays no pagan 'congregations', that is, permanent groups associated with the performance of ritual.

It is, indeed, through the missions that most of the formal teaching of European culture (apart from the instructions given to labourers and servants) which Ovimbundu receive is given. To the Ovimbundu the missionaries are the Europeans who appear in the most favourable light, and even among pagans the attitude to the missions is without the fear accorded to the post or the suspicion with which the traders are regarded. The missionaries alone run schools, and they provide most of the modern medical services. The missionaries come into far more frequent contact with the people than do the *chefes*, and their relationship with the people is not confined to economics as is that of the traders. The Ovimbundu desire to imitate and learn from Europeans; it is from the missionaries that they have most opportunity of learning, and it is in the African clergy that they have the most clear evidence that this learning from Europeans will bring them results.

The organization of the missions is the form of large-scale social structure with which the people are best acquainted, and with which they are most capable of identifying themselves. A

[4] These involve drumming and an open invitation to anybody who wants to turn up. The idea is to persuade the tormenting spirit to pass into a small animal or inanimate object. The minor exorcism (*oku likutilila*) also involves sending the spirit into an inanimate object, but without drumming or the headshaking by the patient which is believed to mark the arrival of the spirit and his acceptance of the offering.

[5] Childs, loc. cit. Personal information.

6:Edwards E-5 (1955-1956)1962
FP13 Mbundu FP13

servant of mine explaining how the Mwekalia chose the chief said, giving me a comparison: 'The Bishop of Nova Lisboa thinks "This priest has sense" and so makes him the superior of a mission'.[6] The disintegration of the old political system, and the association of its representatives with the ritual values which are no longer very significant for the mass of Ovimbundu, has destroyed the old pyramid of authority and prestige. The people associate demands and punishment, for which they seem to receive very little in return, with the post. Many draw a distinction between the actual *chefe* and the government, which they regard as benevolent and ignorant of the behaviour of its representatives. Despite such expressions of loyalty as the singing of the Portuguese national anthem at village parties the 'government' is too distant and shadowy for the Ovimbundu to have much knowledge of it. Nor has the post tried effectively to build up new types of bureaucratic authority in the villages—the government headmen are not given sufficient backing or responsibility by the post to do more than execute its orders.

Hence, the establishment of new types of grouping and leadership at the local level has been the work of the missions, and it is through the missions that these new groupings are articulated on to the total Angolan social system. The missionaries, who provide this articulation between the 'civilized' society and the local organization of the natives, form the section of the 'civilized' population which most satisfies, in its relations with the people, the expectations of the Africans.

To use another term, it is within the Catholic and Protestant Churches that Ovimbundu most clearly identify themselves. Baptism identifies an individual by giving him a name, hence Christians object to non-baptized people identifying themselves in this way. To an individual baptism is significant since it is concerned with his destiny. By it also he identifies himself with the 'civilized' population and achieves a new status superior to that of the pagans. The newly-born child of Christian parents will be given a Christian name and also an Umbundu name from one already held by a dead kinsman.[7] A few villagers

[6] Actually responsibility for appointing superiors of missions largely belongs to the superior of the Nova Lisboa district of the Congregação do Espírito Santo.

[7] For Umbundu names, see Elizabeth Ennis, *African Studies* (Johannesburg) March 1945.

6:Edwards E-5 (1955-1956)1962
FP13 Mbundu FP13

795 551 attempt to take on European surnames. Alternatively, a man may take his father's name and attempt to use it as a surname. Thus Joaõ Batista Tjindandi, a resident of Epalanga, had received Joaõ Batista in baptism, and had taken Tjindandi, his father's name, as a surname. This is, however, not at all a general trend. Even a village of mixed Christian-pagan population may be known by the name of its school, identifying itself by its Christian name.

795 554 A man identifies himself also with social change and with progress by 'entering the school'. When a small girl, whom I asked if she had 'entered into the school' replied 'Not at all', her elder sister's husband remarked: 'She is asleep'. In the general Angolan society the religious referent is the most status-giving type of reference that most Ovimbundu can give.

186 554 There is no very marked feeling in the superiority of one area of Umbundu country to another nor even is there a marked sense of the superiority of Ovimbundu to other tribes—thus the Kimbundu will be highly praised for the degree of European culture they have acquired. The very word Ovimbundu is used as an equivalent of '*pretos*' (blacks) a word not used of 'civilized' Africans, since it is indicative of the lowest colour-class. As a Christian, a man has a status which he shares with Europeans.

797 648 He can also identify himself not only in a general way with the Europeans but more particularly with the general church organization. There is much closer contact between the authority-figures of the church organization and the people than between the authority-figures of the administration and the natives. Thus all Catholics in the Nova Lisboa diocese are confirmed by the Bishop of Nova Lisboa, and have seen him—similarly many of the Protestant Ovimbundu know of Dr. Childs, the headmaster of the Protestant secondary school at Dondi, through having heard him preach at a conference. Some Christian villagers would know the names of pioneer missionaries. Little is known by the people about the personalities or duties of the senior members of their administration, and even their titles are not properly understood.

795 648 The religious differences which exist at local level have no marked significance in the relations of natives to the post. In certain circumstances a pagan may appeal to a Christian

6:Edwards E-5 (1955-1956)1962
FP13 Mbundu FP13

catechist or missionary for support at the post. There is no tendency to confine government appointments to chiefdoms and headmanships to Catholics.[8] However, the Protestant catechists are, unlike the Catholic catechists, not exempt from taxes.[9]

The Ovimbundu no longer possess a coherent political system of their own. They cannot, owing to the nature of their relations with the post and their ignorance of the higher administration, regard the Government as being their representative; the only wide-range systems with which they can identify themselves are the missions. It is through them that the individual is promised eternal life, that the village receives a new type of identity and unity, and that the Ovimbundu as a people participate with the 'civilized' population in ritual communities cutting across the boundaries of culture and geography.

The objection may be made that it is only the Christians who could effectively be represented by the missions and that in Epalanga and Gumba generally baptized Christians formed a minority. It has, however, been previously noted how the school may give its name to a village of mixed population. The catechist will represent both Christians and pagans when he is concerned with the post or with the mission. Moreover, the percentage of pagans in Gumba is far higher than in the rest of Bimbe to which they are linked by the Umbundu language and culture, by administrative divisions, and by a wide range of personal contacts.

It may, then, be asserted, that the catechetical schools and the wider groupings which they build up are the social groups most significant for Umbundu integration on any scale wider than that of the household.

[8] In Gumba the chief and government headman were pagan. There are government-recognized Protestant chiefs elsewhere in Umbundu country.

[9] In some parts of Angola the Catholic catechists are not automatically granted exemption but have to have obtained certain other qualifications, e.g. a certain degree of literacy.